

“Amazon Prioritizes Practical Gadgets”



PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY
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Amazon's fall hardware event is often where it unveils oddball products such as the Alexa microwave and sticky-note printer. This year, the e-commerce giant stuck mainly to more practical devices: a large Kindle e-reader with note-taking capabilities, a sleep-tracking bedside alarm clock and Echo speakers that can boost your Wi-Fi network.

Amazon's strategy has typically been to use its device announcements to do market research about a product's viability. A year ago, the company announced a home robot named Astro that it has yet to make widely available to all consumers. The same goes for a flying indoor security camera unveiled two years ago.

While Wednesday's event was focused on hardware, Amazon's underlying proposition is its software. The new gadgets nudge customers toward the company's digital offerings—e-books, health and wellness content, streaming video and more.

Kindle Scribe: a tablet for reading and writing

The Kindle, until now, has had a singular purpose: display digital books and periodicals purchased through Amazon. The Kindle Scribe adds writing capabilities. It's a leap in functionality and price. While standard Kindles start at \$100, the Scribe will start at \$340 when it becomes available this year.

Over the years, Amazon has added lighting for improved contrast and nighttime reading, Bluetooth connectivity for audiobooks and, more recently, water-resistance. The Scribe includes all of that, in addition to a larger 10.2-inch display, an included pen, a new notebook app and the ability to take notes within Kindle content.

There are two stylus options: a basic pen that magnetically attaches to the side of the Scribe, and a premium pen that also includes a dedicated eraser and a programmable action button.

You can add sticky notes to specific pages in e-books and annotate imported documents. The notebook app includes a to-do list and lined paper template, and any notebooks created on the Scribe will be backed up to Amazon's cloud storage.

Many tablets have compatible styluses and offer drawing capabilities. But their tablets have power-hungry color displays that are harder to see outdoors. The Scribe has three-week battery life for note taking (up to 12 weeks if you use it only to read) and its colorless display is glare-free in direct sunlight.

I'm looking forward to seeing how the Scribe compares to e-ink tablet competitors. The Re Markable 2 has a fantastic handwriting experience, but doesn't support Kindle books. Onyx's Boox can run the Kindle Android app, but I had to jump through hoops to install it.

Halo Rise: a wake-up light that tracks your sleep

Amazon introduced Halo, a wrist-based health tracker, in 2020. Its latest Halo device isn't a wearable, but a \$140 sleep tracker/alarm clock. The Halo Rise, available this year, is designed for nightstands. The device has a digital clock face and a semicircle of lights that can gradually increase in intensity before your alarm goes off.

The Rise has a low-power radar sensor that measures body movements. (Google's Nest Hub also uses radar to detect sleep patterns.) Halo Rise begins recording sleep movements only when the environment is dark and you lie down to sleep.

The existing Halo app can show your time asleep, differences between light and deep sleep and an overall sleep score. Temperature and humidity sensors tell you if the room is too humid or hot for comfortable sleeping. If you enable the Rise to work with Echo speakers, you can ask Alexa how you slept and get a brief spoken report.

Echo Updates: Eero and auto integration

Amazon executives have said the company is focused on technologies

that affect the real world, such as ambient computing and artificial intelligence. The company's Alexa virtual assistant continues to rule over Amazon's priorities.

The new Echo Dot (\$50) and Echo Dot with Clock (\$60) have improved audio quality and a temperature sensor. The digital clock version also has a more interactive screen. But more notably, the smart speakers can now act as mesh Wi-Fi points, extending coverage of Amazon's Eero routers by up to 1,000 square feet. Amazon will bring that Echo-Eero functionality to last year's fourth-generation Echo and Echo Dot as well.

The company announced a second-generation Echo Auto (\$55), a small device that mounts to a car dashboard and adds Alexa capabilities while driving. Since the first one didn't live up to its potential, we'll reserve judgment until we can try this one ourselves.

New features for Fire TV

The Fire TV experience is coming to last year's large Echo Show 15 smart frame as a software update. Translation: You can now stream content from other major services such as Paramount+ on the wall-mounted display. You still can't do this on smaller Echo Show devices.

There's a new Alexa Voice Remote Pro (\$35), which will be sold separately for Fire TV streaming devices. It has a backlit keypad and a remote-finder feature. You can now ask Alexa to locate the remote—a feature that alone makes it worth it.

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contributed to this article.

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